

ABAC Statement on Health

Strengthening Health System Preparedness, Innovation, and Workforce Resilience in the Asia-Pacific

The Asia-Pacific region is facing significant demographic, health, and economic challenges, including aging populations, changing workforce dynamics, and the growing burden of chronic disease. At the same time, advances in artificial intelligence (AI), biotechnology, precision medicine, and digital health are creating new opportunities to improve health outcomes and strengthen system resilience. Realizing these benefits, however, will require policies and partnerships that foster innovation while ensuring health systems remain inclusive, trusted, and resilient.

In 2025, ABAC adopted its Roadmap for Smarter and Inclusive Healthcare as a long-term framework to advance more innovative, equitable, and sustainable healthcare across the Asia-Pacific region. The Roadmap identified two mutually reinforcing priorities: harnessing innovation and technology to build smarter health systems, and expanding access, affordability, and preparedness to ensure more inclusive healthcare for all. Together, these efforts demonstrate how innovation, investment, and public-private collaboration can strengthen health outcomes while enhancing economic resilience and regional competitiveness.

ABAC offers the following recommendations and areas of collaboration:

1. Accelerate the Responsible Use of Health Data and Artificial Intelligence

As AI adoption in healthcare accelerates, economies must move beyond isolated innovation and enable collaboration across institutions. The next phase of AI-enabled healthcare should shift from data sharing to knowledge sharing, encouraging collaboration between healthcare providers and technology developers, so that AI solutions can be developed and validated in ways that reflect real clinical needs and diverse care settings. The promotion of interoperable tools and collaboration on governance practices for AI models will reduce implementation barriers, strengthen institutional trust, and support safe deployment of AI-enabled healthcare in APEC.

The ABAC-endorsed Better AI Together for Health Innovation (BAT-HI) initiative, promotes a decentralized “constellation” approach supported by federated learning and joint validation to reduce reliance on centralized systems and support more trusted, resilient, and inclusive AI-enabled healthcare across the APEC region.

ABAC recommends that economies:

- Strengthen secure, interoperable, and privacy-preserving health data systems that support research, innovation, and evidence-based policymaking.
- Promote trusted frameworks for cross-border health data collaboration, including federated learning, joint model validation, and privacy-enhancing technologies.
- Support collaboration between healthcare providers, researchers, and technology developers to ensure AI solutions address real-world clinical needs.
- Invest in AI literacy and workforce development programs that enable healthcare professionals to safely and effectively use AI-enabled tools.
- Advance governance frameworks that promote the secure, accessible, reliable and trustworthy deployment of AI in healthcare.

2. Strengthen Regulatory Convergence and Access to Medical Innovation

Medical innovation is advancing rapidly, yet patients across the Asia-Pacific region continue to experience significant differences in access to medicines, vaccines, diagnostics, advanced therapeutics, and emerging healthcare technologies. While progress has been made toward regulatory convergence, varying regulatory requirements and duplicative review processes continue to delay access to innovation. With healthcare at a 4-7 percent of regional GDP and APEC's Regulatory Harmonization Steering Committee 2030 convergence goal now in effect, closing these gaps could accelerate access for nearly three billion people.

Without renewed efforts to advance regulatory reliance and mutual recognition, APEC risks creating a two-speed region in which access to medical innovation increasingly depends on where a patient lives with only around 12 of 21 economies currently participating in the Pharmaceutical Inspection Cooperation Scheme. Strengthening regulatory convergence can improve access, reduce costs, accelerate innovation, and support more resilient health systems.

ABAC recommends that economies:

- Advance mutual recognition agreements for product approvals among member economies, beginning on a bilateral basis where broader consensus is not yet feasible.
- Promote high-level exchanges on regulatory science and evaluation techniques to strengthen regulatory capacity and build trust among regulatory authorities.
- Develop common regulatory guidelines that can be adapted across economies while maintaining a consistent core of safety, quality, and efficacy requirements.
- Support regional multi-economy clinical trials, joint scientific advice, and aligned dossier requirements to accelerate patient access to innovative therapies.
- Explore conditional approval pathways for medicines and vaccines addressing serious unmet needs while monitoring outcomes against agreed safety and access metrics.

3. Expand Access to Rehabilitation, Mobility Care, and Healthy Aging

As populations age across the Asia-Pacific region, maintaining physical mobility and functional independence will become increasingly important for workforce participation, productivity, and quality of life. Musculoskeletal disorders already affect hundreds of millions of people across the region and remain among the leading causes of disability and lost productivity.

Expanding access to rehabilitation, preventive care, mobility support, and healthy aging interventions can help economies sustain workforce participation, improve quality of life, reduce long-term care burdens, and support long-term economic resilience.

ABAC recommends that economies:

- Integrate mobility, rehabilitation, and functional health into broader healthy and musculoskeletal economy-level health frameworks.
- Add musculoskeletal function checks to the screening touchpoints each economy already established, with the aim of recognizing early risks rather than confirming a burdensome diagnosis.
- Encourage regulatory convergence to reduce unnecessary duplicate reviews in Disease-Modifying Osteoarthritis Drugs (DMOADs). Establishing fast-tracks at pre-approval stage, would improve patient access to these emerging innovative therapies.
- Improve access to innovative rehabilitation technologies, assistive technologies, and digital rehabilitation tools while expanding insurance coverage.

4. Increase Access to Next-Generation Health Care and Cancer Care

AI, biotechnology, genomics, and precision medicine are also creating new opportunities for next-generation healthcare and cancer care. AI-driven analysis can help identify patient-specific tumor characteristics and inform more targeted treatment options. With the greater capability of prediction tools, the main challenge shifts from identifying therapeutic targets to ensuring that AI-informed treatment options can be interpreted, validated, and integrated into clinical decision-making. APEC economies should develop policy frameworks that can support pathway-based assessments for AI-driven personalized therapies, including clinical evidence, production quality, and post-deployment learning. Developing AI capacity among healthcare professionals will be critical to ensuring these innovations translate into improved health outcomes.

ABAC recommends that economies:

- Support a voluntary, anonymized cross-border cancer genomic data network to foster collaboration among pharmaceutical companies, AI startups, academia, and the public sector.
- Strengthen current governance frameworks for AI-driven personalized treatment to ensure algorithmic transparency and protect the rights of patients and clinicians to understand AI recommendations.
- Facilitate specialized, rolling review pathways for personalized neoantigen vaccines to promote regulatory convergence, focusing evaluations on AI prediction methodologies and manufacturing quality.
- Recognize the 2025 *ABAC Best Practices for Genomics-Driven Precision Medicine* as a foundation for economies considering or at various stages of deployment of large-scale genomics and precision medicine programs.

5. Transform the Care Economy into a Driver of Economic Growth

The care economy, encompassing childcare, eldercare, and long-term care services, plays an increasingly important role in supporting healthy aging, workforce resilience, and sustainable health systems across the Asia-Pacific. As populations age and demand for care rises, gaps in care provision are emerging as a growing challenge for households, healthcare systems, and economies, while much of the burden of care continues to fall through unpaid and informal care work borne disproportionately by women. At the same time, rising demand for care services is positioning the care economy as a potential growth. Strengthening sustainable care ecosystems will therefore be critical to supporting caregivers, advancing women's economic participation, and building more resilient health and care systems.

ABAC recommends that economies:

- Recognize the care economy as a strategic component of economic policy and development planning and integrate care considerations into broader health, economic, labor, and social policy frameworks.
- Advance long-term preparedness for rising care needs by developing sustainable care ecosystems and financing models that ensure accessible, affordable, and quality care services while responding to future demographic demands.
- Strengthen measurement and valuation of care-related activities through improved data collection, analysis, and reporting to support evidence-based policymaking, workforce planning, and long-term care system development.
- Mobilize investment, innovation, and enterprise development across the care economy, including through public-private partnerships, digital technologies, assistive technologies, and innovative care delivery models that improve accessibility, productivity, and quality.

6. Healthy Workforces for Stronger Economies

Across APEC economies, demographic change, longer working lives, labor shortages, and the growing burden of non-communicable diseases are increasingly influencing workforce participation, productivity, and economic resilience. As economies seek to strengthen competitiveness and sustain growth, investing in healthier and more resilient populations should be recognized as an investment in human capital. Business-led approaches, supported by enabling policy environments, can help strengthen workforce participation, productivity, and economic resilience.

ABAC recommends that economies:

- Advance health as an investment in human capital and economic resilience, and encourage policies and business practices that support prevention, early intervention, mental health, and chronic disease management to strengthen workforce participation and productivity.
- Promote access to sustainable health financing, insurance, and supplemental insurance solutions to promote continuity of care, financial resilience, and workforce participation, while expanding access to scalable and affordable models for businesses of all sizes, including MSMEs.
- Advance policies and workplace practices that support healthy aging and economic participation, helping individuals remain productive and engaged throughout longer working lives.
- Foster enabling environments for innovation and evidence-based workforce health solutions, including digital tools and technologies that improve prevention, disease management, harm reduction models, and access to care while respecting privacy and building trust.

Conclusion

ABAC remains committed to working collaboratively with governments, industry, academia, and international organizations to advance practical, scalable, and inclusive solutions that strengthen health systems, improve health outcomes, and support economic resilience across the Asia-Pacific region.

ABAC encourages APEC economies to maintain health as a strategic priority. We support the return of the High-Level Meeting on Health and the Economy in 2027 and beyond as an important platform for strengthening regional cooperation, policy dialogue, and public-private collaboration. The decisions made today will shape the health of our populations, the productivity of our workforces, and the long-term competitiveness, resilience, and prosperity of the region.